

The Daily Independent

Caummisar Honored by State Bar for Donated Work

By Jim Todd

Tuesday, July 1, 2003

The Kentucky Bar Association recently honored Grayson Attorney Robert L. Caummisar of Grayson for his pro bono work.

Caummisar, who became an attorney for Northeast Kentucky Legal Services — now Legal Aid of the Bluegrass — in 1967 after graduating from the University of Kentucky School of Law, is no stranger to helping people who cannot afford to pay for legal services.

After working for Legal Aid for eight years, including six years in Grayson and two in Frankfort, Caummisar started a private practice in Grayson in 1975.

Between giving legal advice to the many organizations and boards on which he serves, Caummisar also takes cases for Legal Aid, in addition to individual cases for clients who do not have money to pay him for his services.

"The traditional pro bono work that some attorneys enroll to accept is through Legal Aid because it is so overburdened and they don't have enough staff to take care of all the cases, so private attorneys help take up the slack," Caummisar said.

"About one-third of my time is donated legal services," said Caummisar, a native of Louisville who says he found his calling and his home in Grayson in 1967.

"All that is not giving legal advice," he said. "For example, I did the legal work for Summer Bash," the Grayson Area Chamber of Commerce's and Carter County Fair Board's fund-raiser. The goal is to sell 10,000 \$100 raffle tickets and give away 80 prizes worth \$600,000.

Caummisar, 64, also has worked with Pathways Inc., the Grayson chamber, Bethany House in Olive Hill, a Christian outreach service, the Carter County emergency food and shelter program, Project Merry Christmas, and the Sunny Club, a local civic organization that primarily helps needy children.

"Then there are the people who come in to the office and just can't afford an attorney," he said. "(Attorneys) kid among ourselves and say we do a lot of pro bono work we didn't intend to do because we didn't get paid.

"But, I'm talking about doing the work and telling them you are not going to charge them," he said. "I want to get my reward from them being served and satisfied, but you have to pick and choose who you do that for or you won't be able to make a good living."

Because his profession has enabled him to make a good living, Caummisar says it is "payback time," time to give back to the community.

"After taking care of your faith and family, you have to concentrate on your community. I firmly believe that."

When he accepted the award from the association last month, Caummisar told the gathering of lawyers that if not for his wife of 39 years, Laura, and his secretary of 15 years, Ruth Isaacs, he would not have received it.

"Laura has been such a good, loving wife and my partner. I could not have done any of this without her."

Caummisar said the award is "like an affirmation of what I've been these past 30 years because I came up through Legal Aid, and at one time was not held in the highest regard by the traditional established bar."

Prestonsburg attorney and friend John Rosenberg, who nominated Caummisar for the award, said he told the association "if there ever was an award that was overdue, it was this one."

"Bob really is a model and an example to lawyers — not only to those in public service, but to those in private practice," Rosenberg said. "He gives so much of himself to voluntary work and to citizens who can't afford a lawyer through Legal Aid and also (pro bono) work on his own."

"And it's not just day-to-day cases," he added. "He took on the case as chairman of the library board in Carter County to establish a library tax, twice taking the case to the Kentucky Supreme Court."

Rosenberg described Caummisar's efforts as heroic.

"Very few lawyers spend that kind of time without charging anyone, except out of civic duty. He has a wonderful record of voluntary work for which he has received numerous awards."